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THAILAND PRESSING COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN IN NORTH

Government troops have encountered strong Communist resistance in their major sweep operation begun in early December against insurgent elements in the rugged, mountainous terrain of northern Nan Province. The 3,000-man police and army force involved has suffered more than 60 casualties and has been severely handicapped by poor intelligence and inadequate logistic support. The operation is targeted against an estimated 200 Communist-led Meo tribesmen, who have displayed considerable tactical skill and discipline in

evading and harassing government forces.

The Thai Communist Party has been working with the northern tribal people for several years and has managed to extend its influence over a number of villages. A defector has stated that the party has trained several hundred tribesmen in Laos and that smaller numbers have also received guerrilla instructions at the Hoa Binh training center in North Vietnam. There are also indications that Communist cadre

from the northeast may have been moved into the north.

The commitment of substantial resources to the operation in Nan Province, as well as the high-level interest shown in Bangkok, is evidence of the government's belated recognition that it is now also facing a substantial subversive threat in northern Thailand. The heavy-handed treatment of the tribal people during the operation, however, and the continuing claims that the dissidence is foreign-inspired indicate that Bangkok is not yet ready to acknowledge that its own tribal policies have been largely responsible for creating a situation ripe for Communist exploitation.

Meanwhile, Communist activity in the more critical northeast has remained at a low level since last spring. The guerrillas there have generally limited their activity to the confiscation of food and to minor acts of intimidation against village Armed clashes with security forces have almost ceased. The Communists have not attracted much peasant support through terrorism and, in the face of increasing pressure from the government, may have decided for the present to concentrate on low-key political efforts.

